

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Experiences of Women and Gender Nonbinary Humanities Students in Higher Education

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More women than men now seek out higher education and have since approximately 1980 (United States Department of Education, 2016); they often seek out learning within humanities fields (United States Department of Education, 2017b). Landmark works have found that women tend to learn differently than men (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997), and that learning within humanities fields tends to differ from learning done in other fields (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Kolb, 1981). With a foundation in intersectional feminist theory, I designed a study (making use of arts based educational research and interpretive phenomenological analysis methodologies) wherein I aimed to learn more about how women and gender nonconforming humanities students experience learning and their perceptions of the status of their fields. I elicited data from eleven participants (obtained through purposeful sampling) using interviews and the creation of an artwork. This research addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on participants' detailed experiences of humanities learning and connecting theories of gendered and discipline-specific learning. Three superordinate themes were constructed through this study; together these themes suggest that women and gender nonconforming humanities students experience a specific higher education journey where they

ascend to the highest levels of learning through active engagement, demonstrating dramatic growth, superior critical thinking skills, and a strong desire to help others. The findings here support the notion that humanities and “feminine” learning intersect to create powerful, lasting learning experiences. This study provides implications for teaching, assessment, policy, and further research.